

# QUINCY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

## SPECIAL EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

A meeting of the Special Education Subcommittee was held on Wednesday, January 17, 2018 at 6:00 pm in the Coddington Building. Present were Mr. James DeAmicis, Mrs. Kathryn Hubley, Mrs. Emily Lebo, and Mr. Anthony Andronico, Chair. Also attending were Superintendent DeCristofaro; Deputy Superintendent Kevin Mulvey, Ms. Sarah Anderson, Ms. Catherine Carey, Ms. Donna Cunningham, Ms. Julie Graham, Mr. Richard Kelley, Ms. Maura Papile, Ms. Erin Perkins, Ms. Madeline Roy, Ms. Allison Cox, Quincy Education Association President; Ms. Cassandra Beck, Quincy Parent Advisory Council to Special Education President; and Ms. Laura Owens, Clerk.

Mr. Andronico called the Special Education Subcommittee meeting to order at 6:05 pm.

Director of Special Education Erin Perkins introduced the Special Education department staff Team Administrators and each gave a brief overview of their roles working with elementary, middle, and high school staff and outside Special Education placements. Mrs. Perkins explained that the Special Education chairs at the elementary school level are the guidance counselors; at the middle school, the Special Education teachers chair their own student cases; at the high school level, the role is filled by the Special Education department chairs.

Special Education Team Administrators Catherine Carey, Donna Cunningham, Julie Graham, and Richard Kelley presented on the Special Education Rights and Responsibilities, the goal being so that educators will understand their role regarding special education; to enhance collaboration between family and school personnel; and so that parents and school personnel will participate in special education matters as knowledgeable partners. The Quincy Public Schools Special Education Department operates under the federal Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Massachusetts Special Education Law administered by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

Students are eligible for Special Education if all three of the following are true: (1) the student has one or more disabilities; (2) the student is not making effective progress in school as a result of their disability or disabilities; and (3) the student requires specialized instruction in order to make effective progress. There are 12 different types of disabilities defined by state and federal regulations: Autism, developmental delay, intellectual impairment, sensory impairment/hearing; sensory impairment/vision loss; sensory impairment/deafness and blindness; neurological impairment; emotional impairment; communication impairment; physical impairment; health impairment; a specific learning disability; or any combination of the above.

Special Education is specially-designed instruction to meet the unique needs of an eligible student and/or related services necessary to access and make progress in the general curriculum. The

timeline for entry into Special Education is up to 45 school working days, beginning with the parents' consent to evaluate, followed by evaluation and a team meeting to determine eligibility. A proposed IEP is then generated and /or placement recommendation. Services begin upon parental consent.

There are six principles of Special Education: (1) parent and student participation – it is the obligation of the school district to make strong efforts, in multiple ways, to ensure parental and student participation; (2) Free and appropriate public education; (3) Appropriate evaluation and three-year re-evaluation; (4) Individualized Education Program (IEP) which contains written information on the parents' concerns and the students skills, a written explanation of how the disability affects the student's ability to learn and to demonstrate his or her learning; an identification of specific, measurable goals which can be reached in a year's time; and a listing of the services to be provided to the student. (5) Least Restrictive Environment – to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities have the right to be educated in the general education environment and in the classroom they would have attended if they did not have disabilities. Removal from the general education program occurs only if the nature or severity is such that education in general education classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be satisfactorily achieved. (6) Procedural Safeguards include right to written notice; right to consent/refuse; right to "stay put"; problem resolution system; mediation and due process; timelines; confidential records; right to receive any evaluations 2 days in advance of Team meeting, if requested.

Ms. Beck asked Ms. Graham to explain the IEP vision statement, which is created with the parent and Special Education team (and includes the student once they are age 14) and sets goals for 1 to 5 years in the future. Mr. Kelley said that once students are age 14, the process of creating a Transition Plan begins and is part of the IEP for review and revision each year.

Mrs. Lebo asked for update on disability definitions, Mrs. Perkins said there is a parent-led movement to add Dyslexia to the primary disability list. While QPS does include this diagnosis when made by an outside resource, not all school systems are consistently doing this. Mrs. Lebo asked if QPS has the capacity to diagnose dyslexia, it is currently considered a medical diagnosis and while teachers or administrators may suspect it, they cannot confirm the diagnosis.

Mrs. Perkins said dyslexia and language-based learning disabilities are sometimes associated. A student may have language-based learning disabilities including dyslexia or a student may have dyslexia or dysgraphia alone.

Mrs. Perkins introduced the presentation on Special Education Pathways in the Quincy Public Schools, reviewing the Special Education mission statement focused on empowering students and stressing that Special Education is a service provided to support students, not a place that students are directed to. In addition to academic services, student support is provided by music, physical, occupational, emotional therapies.

Starting at the Pre-Kindergarten level, the pillars of Special Education are to identify students as early as possible; maximize exposure to language; meet students at their developmental level both academically and socially; and to prepare students for the transition to Kindergarten and beyond. Learning the skills of self-regulation in a classroom environment are easiest under age 6. Both the Snug Harbor and Della Chiesa Early Childhood Center have integrated classes of 3- and 4-year old students (8 typically-developing peers and 7 students on IEPs for various reasons). In addition, CARES for Pre-Kindergarten (students with autism) is at the Della Chiesa ECC and there are currently 8 classrooms with 69 students. Pre-Kindergarten students may go on to attend Kindergarten, Transitional Kindergarten, or continue in CARES classrooms. There are currently two Transitional Kindergarten classes, at Atherton Hough or Lincoln Hancock; each has 8-11 students. CARES classes for elementary school grade levels are at Snug Harbor and Squantum.

At the elementary level, the pillars of Special Education are to provide a free and appropriate education for all of our students so that they may be successful in the least restrictive environment; and to identify students as early as possible and provide scientifically research-based reading, math, and writing interventions based on individual student needs.

Through the Integrated Learning Team process, general education students are identified as needing support for Literacy, Special Education resource room, and/or English Language Education. For all three programs, there is at least one specialist in each area at each elementary school. For students who have not made effective progress under these programs, placement in a specialized program will be made: CARES, Learning Center, STARS, and LDC.

CARES (Autism Spectrum Disorders): maximum of 9 students, a teacher, and two aides. ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis) services are provided by one certified teacher and two consultants. Paraprofessionals are also trained in ABA and two teachers are working on certification. Inclusion opportunities as appropriate for the individual student's needs and based on student IEPs. CARES students begin at Della Chiesa ECC and transition to either Squantum or Snug Harbor for Grades K-2. At Grade 3, students may be fully integrated or continue at Snug Harbor for Grades 3-5.

The Learning Center program is for students with intellectual or developmental delays. The program provides individual or small group instruction in a highly structured environment. Inclusion opportunities are provided as appropriate for the individual student's needs and based on student IEP. Currently, the program begins at Della Chiesa ECC and moves to Squantum for K-5.

The Language Development Program is designed for students who present with a language-based learning disability and may also demonstrate weaknesses in receptive language. Individual or small group instruction in a highly-structured environment with inclusion opportunities as appropriate. LDC begins in Grade 1; students may come from Transitional Kindergarten or may enter from general education at any grade. Students may attend Snug Harbor or Atherton Hough for Grades 1-5.

The STARS program is for students who present with emotional impairment and students require individual or small group instruction in a highly structured environment; inclusion opportunities are provided as appropriate. Students may enter the program from the Transitional Kindergarten or enter at any elementary grade. The program is located at Parker for Grades 1-5.

For Middle School Special Education, students are ages 11-13, but vary dramatically in terms of maturity. Students transition from children to young adults during the middle school years. For middle school, additional pillars are to promote collaborative practices across educational settings between general and special educators and service providers, while providing academic, social, and emotional supports necessary so that students enter high school on the path to college and career readiness.

Middle School Special Education includes Inclusion Support, Resource Room Support, and Specialized Programs (CARES, Learning Center, STARS, LDC). Teachers are supported through the Middle School Math Special Education Team, which provides opportunities for collaboration with Math content teachers on curriculum goals, classroom strategies, and unit development that directly align to the specific needs of students. Diagnostic tools include the iReady and MAP assessments.

For CARES, students from Snug Harbor transition to Sterling for Grades 6-8. For the Learning Center, students transition from Squantum to Broad Meadows. For the Language Development Class, students transition from Snug Harbor and Atherton Hough to Broad Meadows. STARS students transition from Parker to Point Webster for Grades 6-8. At all middle schools, multiple inclusion opportunities are provided for all students as it meets their needs for socialization and academic support. Teachers collaborate on co-teaching and inclusion opportunities and students are integrated in homerooms, lunch, and specialists. The STARS program has a dedicated Guidance counselor working closely with the students in the program, to give them the tools to self-regulate in a general education setting.

For the high school level, the middle school pillars of providing collaborative practices and academic, social, and emotional support are continued. At Quincy High School, students are generally from Broad Meadows, Central, Point Webster, and Sterling. Resource Room options are available for Math, English, Social Studies, and Science for all grades as needed. There are currently Inclusion Classes for English, Math, and Science content area classes.

At North Quincy High School, students are generally from Atlantic, Central, and Sterling; there are Inclusion Math, English, and Science classes, but currently no separate Resource Room classes. Both high schools offer Learning Strategies for Grades 9-12. Ms. Beck asked for clarification that if a NQHS student had Resource Room needs, there would be suitable supports available. Ms. Anderson said that adjustments are made at each high school as determined to meet individual student needs.

Specialized programs for high school: CARES and the Learning Center (combine into one program); PASS at North Quincy High School; GOALS; and PACE (upper LDC) at Quincy High School. The CARES/TLC students in Grades 9-12 are from Broad Meadows and Sterling and are working on self-advocacy, portfolio assessment, and towards a certificate.

The PACE program consists of students from LDC at Broad Meadows and some CARES students from Sterling. With consistent support, these students are working on transitioning to inclusion and general academic classes. These students take MCAS and graduate with a diploma.

The STARS program at Point Webster transitions to the GOALS program for Grades 9-12. Students may transition in and out at any grade, small group academic, social, and emotional interventions are provided.

The PASS program is based at NQHS and is a program for students with social-emotional and/or mental health concerns. The goal of the program is to develop coping skills and self-regulation strategies that will enable them to return to the general setting. Group and individual counseling, life skills, and collaboration with outside agencies are key components of the program.

The Transition Program (LEAP) is for students ages 18-22 and provides a unique and meaningful educational experience together with real world learning opportunities that will empower young adults with disabilities the knowledge and skills needed for a successful transition into the community. The program emphasizes community-based instruction and community work experience with a focus on the development of social skills, independent living, and financial literacy. Students are training for custodial and food services positions in Quincy Public Schools and training and internship opportunities will be provided by a number of outside agencies. Mrs. Perkins said we have been working with a partnership with Massasoit Community College and two students may take classes there next fall.

Out-of-District students are placed for a variety of different reasons. As a team, after exhausting the resources within Quincy Public Schools, a recommendation for outside placement will be made. There are many resources for placement, 161 students currently in out-of-district placements, ranging from Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12 and beyond to age 22. 47 students are placed for autism, 40 for emotional needs, 18 for multiple needs, and 14 for language. Through the LEAP program, some older students are transitioning from an outside placement to NQHS.

Mrs. Perkins completed the presentation by noting that as educators, we are always striving to improve practices through strengthening the relationship between general and special educators. There are overlaps for Professional Development and also Special Education-specific Professional Development. Mrs. Perkins thanked School Committee for support and parents for entrusting their students to the Special Education Department.

Mr. DeAmicis thanked the presenters, their commitment to the students is evident by the depth of their knowledge and the initiatives over the last few years.

Ms. Beck then presented an update on behalf of QPAC, which is currently working in collaboration with the Special Education Department and the YMCA to create inclusion opportunities; working on pairing Parent Academy events with QPAC meetings. Gingerbread House event was the biggest ever; Enchanted Village trip was magical. Parent concerns are being addressed as they arise through the Special Education department and Dr. DeCristofaro, there are no open issues at this time.

Dr. DeCristofaro thanked the Special Education team which is made up of extraordinary teachers and administrators and the strong relationships carefully nurtured between parents and staff.

Mrs. Lebo made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 pm. Mr. DeAmicis seconded the motion and on a voice vote, the ayes have it.